

Eugene Zachary Bertrand

Eastern Connecticut State University

Elementary Education and History, B.S.

Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Eugene Zachary Bertrand, I am a sophomore at Eastern Connecticut State University, double majoring in Elementary Education and History. I am humbled by the opportunity I have been given to be in front of you today to share my personal narrative in an effort to echo the importance of funding in higher education.

The importance of education has been told to me from a young age. Both of my parents and maternal and paternal grandparents are from different countries, which makes me a First-Generation American. Growing up in my maternal household, my mother, who was the first in her family to receive a college education, would often stress the significance of having a college education. My maternal grandmother would also tell me it was “important to retain the fact that your education is something nobody can ever take away from you.”

In my high school career, I had the opportunity to work with Educators4Excellence, Congresswoman Jahana Hayes, Governor Lamont, and now-Secretary Miguel Cardona on policy that ensures diversity, equity, and inclusion in education. If it was not for Secretary Cardona encouraging me to become an educator, I would have gone into the United States Air Force.

I became the exemplar of my family’s aspirations when I had the opportunity to become a member of the Eastern Connecticut State University, as a warrior. Prior to stepping onto Eastern’s campus, our former Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Walter Diaz recruited me to work into his office as a Student Worker. I was awarded a scholarship, but that barley covered a third of my tuition. With this paid position, it opened endless opportunities for me at Eastern. If it was not for Walter Diaz, I wouldn’t be in front of you today encouraging you all to please, continue investing in students like me, who are ambitious and want to instill change in a society that is unjust. With this position, I was able to further my aspirations in and outside of the Eastern community. Today, I am proud to say, I have earned a full ride to Eastern being a Resident Assistant which offers an on-campus housing scholarship and a member of the University’s Honors Program which a full tuition academic scholarship.

Eastern has equipped me with tools that will only enhance my education and the self-confidence to be a student leader in any environment I choose to walk into. I plan on paying it forward as a contentious educator to enable students to see their true potential like Dr. Diaz and Dr. Cardona did for me.

Moving forward, I will continue to contribute to the State of Connecticut with one motto in the back of my mind: “it is important to retain the fact that your education is something that no one can ever take away from you.” This brings me to my point: Public funding for higher education is essential as it has allowed students just like me reach their full potential and not have to worry as much about the financial burden while trying to pursue a higher education degree. So, I am asking that you please, continue to invest in me and my peers’ future. Properly distributing sufficient funds to higher education institutions in Connecticut is an investment. As many of us speaking today, and the rest of the students who belong to CSU’s are the future leaders of Connecticut and plan on returning that investment for greatness.